Teams as substitutes for leadership

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Abstract
Purpose – The aim of this paper is to address teams as substitutes for leadership. The article makes use of juridical foundations as a normative basis for addressing substitutes for leadership. Together with the means of management and leadership, the juridical foundations constitute the background for defining sufficient and good supervisory work, which is used as an assistant instrument in addressing the research question: can teams act as substitutes for leadership?

Design/methodology/approach – In this article, substitutes for leadership theories are used to analyze the status of teams. The article includes a preliminary empirical study in a timber procurement organization and ideas for further investigations are provided.

Findings – Teams often do not act as internal supervisors or as sources of feedback and incentives, even though they are expected to do so. Some team members experience feelings of abandonment. Although planned as substitutes or supplements, teams can instead become neutralizers.

Originality/value – This paper contributes to recognizing the status of teams and to research questions concerned with explanations for the problems of teams.

Keywords Leadership, Team working, Line managers, Employment legislation, Finland

Introduction
There are two different kinds of preconditions in every workplace:

(1) managerial arrangements; and

(2) juridical orders.

The aim of this paper is to make use of both juridical foundations and means of management and leadership to address when teams can act as substitutes for leadership. An employer’s general obligations as set out by the Finnish Employment Contracts Act and the orders set out in the Finnish Occupational Safety and Health Act concerning an employer’s substitute are used as normative bases for exploring the topic. The phrase “sufficient and good supervisory work” is used as an assisting concept. These bases suggest that leadership at least partly derives from hierarchy. In addition, the bases include certain norms that cannot be ignored when implementing everyday management and leadership.

Teams are a very common means of arranging work in modern-day organizations. Teams have to take care of many duties that have earlier belonged to supervisors. At the same time, supervisors have changed from acting as close foremen to facilitators (Macneil, 2001; Huusko, 2006a, b, c). In practice, the number of supervisors per subordinate has been reduced when hierarchies have been lowered and teams as well as direction systems have emerged within organizations. Hence, the role of leadership finds itself in a new situation and it seeks solutions for both new executives and new
The role of a supervisor or a substitute for the employer as a facilitator is discussed alongside theories regarding substitutes for leadership in order to determine the status of teams (Huusko, 2006b).

Theories that address substitutes for leadership include the idea of moderators that have different kinds of effects on the actions of leaders and leaders’ substitutes. Many current arrangements like teams, direction systems, management from a distance, etc., can support, supplement, substitute but can also even negate the leaders’ impact on employees. For example, employees will not get or understand the orders concerning their everyday work due to long distances between supervisors and subordinates if there are no proper communication processes or equipment in place. Research on leadership substitutes also contributes to a legal approach as it “focuses on whether subordinates are receiving needed task guidance and incentives without taking it for granted that the formal leader is the primary supplier” (Howell et al., 1990, p. 23). From an organization theory point of view, this paper preliminarily takes into consideration that the legislative background is based on quite Tayloristic suppositions, while theories of substitutes for leadership and ideas of teams include rather symbolic-interpretative elements (Hatch, 1997).

From an empirical side, this paper focuses on workers’ views and definitions of sufficient and good supervisory work. Preliminary results of one portion of a research project concerning changes in supervisory work[1] are introduced in this paper. The case study has been conducted within the Finnish forestry industry. The responses to open-ended questions were addressed in accordance with Kotter’s (1990) division of management and leadership. The main finding is that leadership aspects are emphasized within employees’ images of sufficient and good supervisory work. The responses show that there is a lack of feedback, which points to inadequate management arrangements. The respondents regard personal contact, incentives, feedback and moderate targets as elements of sufficient and good supervisory work. The data included only a few mentions of teams or the meaning of teams as a source of support or feedback. Hence, teams do not act comprehensively as a substitute for leadership. The target organization would benefit from concentrating on the skills and capabilities of their teams as well as team leaders.

Both the preliminary theoretical framework and the empirical results demonstrate that it is useful to continue to research the question of sufficient and good supervisory work and the idea of substitutes for leadership. The challenge is to develop proper means for both theoretical and empirical investigation of these topics. Besides teams, other current means of management, like computer-aided direction systems, act as substitutes for leadership. Also, their status within traditional relations between supervisors and subordinates is worth researching. The idea of moderators refers to different kinds of factors that exist in workplaces. The aim is to test whether the factors help to form groups as the changing supervisory-subordinate relations are investigated through factor analysis.

Main concepts for the research
This paper makes use of three main concepts, i.e. concepts of teams, juridical terms and substitutes for leadership theories. The particular concept of a team has been developed from an earlier, well-known team concept. The initial concept described by Katzenbach and Smith (1994) is used as a basis and Huusko’s (2003) concept of a
suitable team is used as an advanced version. Katzenbach and Smith (1994, p. 59) have provided a clear and demanding definition:

A team is a small number of people with complementary skills who are committed to a common purpose, performance goals, and working approach for which they hold themselves accountable.

A number of criticisms have been directed at this definition due to its focus on skills (excluding roles) and its developing curve that looks oversimplified and too optimistic (Van Amelsvoort and Benders, 1996; Kuipers, 2005). Furthermore, the definition lacks clear comments on teams’ status, although these can be found in the texts of Katzenbach and Smith (1994). The approach of Katzenbach and Smith (1994) has been mentioned as one of consultants who “describe teamworking as a packageable commodity that can be sold to companies in order to facilitate their competitive around” (Mueller et al., 2000, p. 1388).

In spite of the criticism, the definition – or parts of it – can be found as a basis for many other definitions (Hamde, 2000; Ramstad and Jokelainen, 2000; Mueller et al., 2000; Benders et al., 2001). Especially from the point of view of management and changes in supervisory work, this basis proves to be promising. Consequently, it forms the basis for the concept of a suitable team: “A suitable team is both suitable and empowered for addressing the tasks that are given to it and competent to act as a part of a work contract” (Huusko, 2003). The basic idea of a suitable team includes two conditions:

1. a team must be a suitable way for working and arranging the duties of employees; and
2. a team must have an established rank such that it is accepted as able to act as part of a work contract.

The message of the developed team concept is that management arrangements that include changes in supervisory relations and responsibilities must be addressed as issues of a work contract.

Several arrangements in post-modern organizations have blurred earlier roles of supervisors and subordinates. The aim of teams is to take on more managerial tasks and replace supervisors (Bacon and Blyton, 2005). The Finnish Employment Contracts Act as well as the Finnish Occupational Safety and Health Act include clear directives concerning persons who aim to substitute employers. These acts were renewed in the years 2001 and 2003 and they are furthermore based on an assumption that there is a human being in an organization who represents the employer in relationships with workers. In this paper, these basic acts compose the normative basis for addressing substitutes for leadership. These norms are understood as compulsory elements within management arrangements, such as the use of teams.

Howell et al. (1990) state in their substitutes for leadership theory that teams can act as moderators. Four kinds of moderators can be identified:

1. neutralizers;
2. enhancers;
3. supplements; and
4. substitutes.
Neutralizers are attributes of subordinates, tasks and organizations that interfere with a leader’s aims to influence workers. For example, long distances can become neutralizers if workers cannot get advice for their everyday work. Supplements complete a leader’s impact on employees, while enhancers amplify it. Well-organized computer systems, such as team posts and timetables that are available to every member, can supplement a leader’s impact. An enhancer must be a real possibility to influence one’s own and/or a team’s duties. Actual substitutes, like properly empowered teams, work to such a degree that they virtually negate a leader’s ability to either improve or impair workers’ performance (Howell et al., 1990). According to Howell et al. (1990, p. 27), the trick is “to develop such norms and structures that consistently produce feedback when feedback is needed, rather than merely an occasional spontaneous outburst when circumstances become intolerable”.

Legislative background as a normative basis for supervisory work
Chapter two of the Employment Contracts Act (55/2001) states the following about an employer’s general obligations:

The employer shall in all respects work to improve employer/employee relations and relations among the employees. The employer shall ensure that employees are able to carry out their work even when the enterprise’s operations, the work carried out or the work methods are changed or developed. The employer shall strive to further the employees’ opportunities to develop themselves according to their abilities so that they can advance in their careers.

In addition, the Occupational Safety and Health Act orders workplaces to take care of delegation procedures and, within them, the skills and background of supervisors at all stages. A section of Law 16 states:

Employer’s substitute
The employer may place another person to represent him or her (employer’s substitute) and take care of the duties imposed on employers in this Act. The duties of the employer’s substitute shall be defined accurately enough taking into account the employer’s line of business, the nature of the work or activities and the size of the workplace. The employer shall ensure that the substitute is sufficiently competent, he or she has received an adequate orientation to the duties and that he or she also otherwise has appropriate capabilities for attending to the duties referred to here.

This paper is based on the supposition that the directives mentioned above provide a normative basis for the concept of sufficient and good supervisory work. The supposition sets out that an employer cannot avoid the demands that have been defined by legislation. The normative background that represents the modern paradigm will be tested by workers’ conceptions that represent the symbolic-interpretative paradigm (Hatch, 1997). As an employer or an employer’s substitute aims to use new means of management and leadership, he or she has to assure that these means are suitable and sufficient. In addition, the skills needed in new positions must be assured (Huusko, 2006a). In this paper, supervisory work is understood as the duties that are at least partly addressed by the person who represents the employer. In this sense, the definition matches the legislative concept of an “employer’s substitute”. In fact, the Employment Contracts Act (first paragraph) uses the phrase “under consideration of employer”. Therefore, a person must be identifiable behind decisions concerning personnel management if there are plans to
manage using other instruments than people. By evaluating the chosen definition of supervisory work by organization theories, one can say that it belongs to a modern paradigm as it addresses employer and employees in quite a Tayloristic way (Hatch, 1997). That is, the two parties recognize each other well or, simply expressed, an employee knows who the substitute for his/her employer is and supervisors know their subordinates. However, in many cases, responsibilities are diffused as organizations aim to get flatter with the use of teams (Huusko, 2003; Kuipers, 2005).

Kotter (1990) has emphasized the meaning of leadership as well as the suitable combination of management and leadership during change processes. As such, the responses in the empirical part are examined using Kotter’s (1990) division of management and leadership.

**Team concepts include many references to substitutes for leadership**

Large amounts of earlier research concerning groups and stages in the movement from groups to teams emphasize internal relations that can both advance or hinder teamwork. Adequate support from a hierarchy at any developing stage is needed but supervisors must be aware of the progress that is being made. They must also be able to empower teams and leave them to work independently (Tuckman, 1965; Sinclair, 1992; Van Amelsvoort and Benders, 1996; Kakadabse and Sheard, 2002; Chen and Klimoski, 2003; Mills and Ungson, 2003). At the same time, Sinclair (1992) has argued that attention must be paid to team members’ feelings of being abandoned. This comment supports the legislative point of view by arguing for a supervisory touch to a team’s surveillance.

Teams are used as a means of lowering hierarchies and shifting duties. In such cases, supervisors are often let go with the notion that their duties can be covered within teams. Indeed, the skills needed at every level in an organization may be forgotten (Katz, 1955; Hamde, 2000; Huusko, 2003; Kuipers, 2005; Bacon and Blyton, 2005). These findings hint at the moderators found by Howell et al. (1990). They match partly with the concept of the suitable team as well. Teams do not come into existence through a renaming of groups into “teams”. Both concepts call for time within change processes concerning developing substitutes and teams. This paper attempts to go forward in the manner that Jermier and Kerr (1997, p. 99) describe:

We need to know more about how people respond to various substitutes. Thus, detailed fieldwork which examines the development of substitutes over a period of time and the subjective meaning the substitutes are given by people in the setting would be informative, as would be work aimed at understanding how substitutes affect a variety of reactions by participants in the settings.

Within positive approaches, teams have been seen as a means of broadening duties, enriching work, enabling feedback by interaction, using rotation of work and providing feelings of comprehensive work and common goals. These elements refer to the feelings of satisfaction in work and partly to interaction in groups and teams (Kuipers and de Witte, 2005; Conny, 2005; Bacon and Blyton, 2005). Feelings of well-rounded work and common goals may, however, also cause “feelings of erased job classifications and un-defined positions” (Morgan, 1989, p. 131). If teams have been implemented poorly there is uncertainty concerning duties and responsibilities at several levels. Since using teams concerns both supervisors and middle managers, it would be useful to remember what Katz (1955) wrote over 50 years ago. Katz argued
that technical, human and conceptual skills are needed at every level of an organization. Hence, if the team structure is a strategic choice in an organization, what results is a transfer of responsibilities from supervisors to team members. These shifts of responsibilities include some kind of stance regarding the skills needed at different levels and different posts of an organization (Katzenbach and Smith, 1994; Van Amelsvoort and Benders, 1996; Hamde, 2000; Huusko, 2003, 2006a, b, c).

Morgan (1989, p. 131) argues that “the whole notion of job enrichment and job enlightenment has probably been somewhat oversold. As somebody said recently, it really isn’t much of an enrichment of the job if what you do is wash the spoons on Monday and wash the glassware on Tuesday”. This facetious example refers to phrases, models and fads that have emerged in many organizations without adequate criticism. It is useful to note that different points of view concerning teams work at least partly against each other. Hence, the managerial arrangements like teams include features that refer to moderators within substitutes for leadership theories.

To clarify the reasoning behind teams, Bacon and Blyton (2005) have conducted well-founded research concerning employees’ views of why and how managers introduced teamwork at several sites within a steel company. The classification of motivating aspects shown by Bacon and Blyton (2005) seem interesting while hinting to links with substitutes for leadership as well. The categories of reasoning for teamwork are economic, political, institutional and cultural. Examples of economic rationales were comments such as using teamwork to improve returns to shareholders and facilitating job cuts. Political rationales included managers introducing teamwork to advance their own careers and to protect their existing jobs. Following company fads as well as launching initiatives were considered to fall under the institutional rationales or motivations. Finally, rationales that fell into the cultural category included the aim of breaking up traditional crews or when managers were seen to enforce greater consent (Bacon and Blyton, 2005). Very likely, these different justifications for teams lead to different solutions within management and leadership.

An overall view of using teams includes many assumptions, expectations and results that dovetail with discussion about substitutes for leadership. Both the conflicting elements described earlier and misleading definitions within planning and implementing teamwork (following Benders and Van Hootegem, 1999; Bacon and Blyton, 2005) constitute the basis for the idea to address how teamwork could be used to substitute leadership. Different kinds of enhancers, neutralizers, substitutes and supplements of leadership can be recognized. In this paper, a team organization is explored as both a remedy for satisfying the challenges of modern work life and with respect to legislation. Therefore, the imaginable substitutes for leadership include a need for personal measures and activities but also possibilities for enhancers or neutralizers. Hence, internal supervision and feedback, feelings of working toward a common goal, job satisfaction and feelings of being left aside must be taken into consideration. The planning and implementation of change processes should provide team members with sufficient means and capabilities to cope with broadening tasks (Hamde, 2000; Huusko, 2003).

The definition of a suitable team described above involves an assumption that using teams results in clear changes in the organization of work. Reorganizing means going through the trouble of clarifying both the responsibilities to be shifted and the skills needed in new positions. Shifts in the positions between actors depend on the depth of
the changes in the decision structure and how the top management sees and wants to see teams and their authority (Hamde, 2000; Huusko, 2003). Van der Vegte et al. (2003) have argued that creating the right match between task and goal interdependence is a big and important challenge for supervisors. Hence, a suitable team represents a very demanding concept. This paper argues that if the concept is implemented carefully it can act as a substitute for leadership. Therefore, conditions for teams as substitutes for leadership can be summarized as follows. Team members are dependent on each other in a positive sense, through such things as feelings of sharing a common approach to work and common responsibilities within everyday duties. They take their broadening duties as a source of incentives. In addition, they are competent and ready to act as partners in their work contract, including the meeting of targets and objectives. The whole produces internal feedback and incentives that are needed in everyday work.

**Case study: material collection and analysis**

The empirical approach of this research is based on a case study of a large company within the Finnish forestry industry that makes use of teams as well as computer-aided management systems. The target teams were selected together with the local managers following the geographical divisions of the company. The target organization is divided into five areas, two of which were involved in the investigation. Each of the five areas has a local executive that operates with the use of teams and computer-aided management systems. In this company, many tasks that earlier belonged to supervisors have been shifted to teams. The teams have their own targets to achieve. In this case, computer-aided management systems refer to enterprise resource planning at the company level and three computer-aided systems at the local level. These management systems include target cards, amongst others. These cards include targets for the teams, the measures of success of the teams in achieving the targets as well as the follow-up of how the merit pays have developed in the teams. One local executive can even have more than 70 subordinates who work in teams. In practice, this means that some teams work far away (over 100 kilometres) from their supervisors’ office. In their entirety, management and leadership are addressed by three components:

1. local managers;
2. teams; and
3. computer-aided management systems.

In addition, the local managers mention team leaders as acting somewhat as coordinators or assistants in certain issues. Team leaders, however, do not have any supervisory rights within everyday situations. The question of sufficient and good supervisory work is relevant in this target company.

The data was collected during the summer of 2006 as part of a larger investigation carried out by two MSc (Econ) students at the University of Joensuu. The material for this paper was collected by a questionnaire, specifically through responses to two open-ended questions:

1. “In your opinion, which tasks are included in sufficient and good supervisory work?”; and
2. “In your opinion, what kinds of aspects from a supervisor’s duties are not suitable to be taken care of by business operation systems?”[2].
The answers to the first question will be addressed in this paper.

The questionnaire was sent to all employees who worked in teams within the selected areas. The total number of potential respondents who received the questionnaire by e-mail was 175. The number of returned questionnaires was 138, making the response rate 78. The number of written responses varied between questions, with 103 responses for the first question. One respondent provided the response “I cannot express my opinion” and 33 respondents gave no answer. The lack of answers to open-ended question may be a consequence of the questionnaire being quite long and dense. In addition, the organization had recently had several other inquiries and surveys amongst their personnel. It can thus be suggested that some respondents were simply tired of filling out questionnaires. However, for the topic of this paper the responses are sufficient and can also be used to inform further studies.

In this company, team members entered the workforce during different decades (1960-2000). They had worked in teams for over ten years and some of them have been participants in earlier studies conducted by the author. The age characteristics of the respondents were as indicated in Table I.

Responses were typed up by a student under the supervision of the author. The responses were read to identify and check the elements and content of sufficient and good supervisory work. Reading took place several times by the author as well as by the student to add to both internal validity and validity between researchers. Then the responses were considered by using qualitative analysis of themes and types.

Case study: results

The responses for the first question (total 103) were analyzed by using the division by Kotter (1990) as a framework. The response notes (total 187[3]) were qualified by themes raised from the division and quantified under the subtopics. Table II shows that the majority of notes are situated in the leadership area. Almost a quarter of the notes referred to management elements and contents.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age range (years)</th>
<th>n (per cent)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>24-29</td>
<td>9 (8.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>14 (13.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>38 (36.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-59</td>
<td>30 (29.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 60</td>
<td>11 (10.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not indicated</td>
<td>1 (0.9)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table I. Age characteristics of respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Management</th>
<th>45 (24 per cent)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>142 (76 per cent)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table II. Absolute and percentage values of main groups of Kotter (1990)
When the notes are classified according to the ages of the respondents an interesting illustration can be made. Respondents from the youngest group (under 30 years) and the oldest group (over 60 years) differ clearly from the “middle” groups. These same findings have also been reached in an earlier investigation by the author (Huusko, 2006b).

The notes that belong to the management field refer to arrangements and elements such as structures, tasks and resources that form many conditions for teams. They refer to some factors that, in theories of substitutes for leadership, are identified as moderators. According to Howell et al. (1986, 1990) different kinds of moderators can act as neutralizers, enhancers, supplements and substitutes (Schriesheim and Kerr, 1977; cited by Schriesheim, 1997). These elements can be recognized in various combinations within the response notes. Three different kinds of example can be given to demonstrate this:

Sufficient and good supervisory work includes the supervisor knowing the possibilities of his subordinates, their capabilities and skills to carry out their duties by moderate exertions. The supervisor ensures that work skills correspond to the level demanded, tools and other resources are in good condition and rewards are given at an appropriate level. The employer follows the well-being of his subordinates as well as encourages them (man, 59 years old).

I guess today, it’s more about keeping up-to-date. In the forest industry, one supervisor (such as us) has such a large amount of subordinates in a large area that personal contacts are minimal. It would be good if we met once in three months. I would consider a good supervisor to be supportive and one who supports people in the field by giving clear advice (man, 30).

Adequate contact so that the supervisor knows how it’s going and knows the circumstances in which the subordinate works (woman, 42).

According to the respondents, sufficient and good supervisory work includes certain planning, organizing and controlling duties as well as establishing direction but particularly, aligning people and motivating and inspiring duties. Table II reveals that categories 5 and 6 stand out the most. The emphasis on leadership activities sharpens as the notes in categories 5 and 6 are organized under more specific topics. Leadership elements and contents of sufficient and good supervisory work in team members’ responses are shown in Table III. What results is that the nature of leadership is opened up, as Higgs (2003) has tried to achieve. It is possible that the form of the question, “What kinds of things do you see as being sufficient and good work by your superior?”, encouraged certain kinds of responses from the respondents. In any case, the notes revealed the need for personal contact, highlighted from a legislative point of view.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leadership 142</th>
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</table>

**Table III.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leadership elements and contents of sufficient and good supervisory work in team members’ responses</th>
<th>Produces change and movement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5. Aligning people</td>
<td>6. Motivating and inspiring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5a. Communicate goals</td>
<td>6a. Inspire and energize</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5b. Seek commitment</td>
<td>6b. Empower subordinates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5c. Build teams and coalitions</td>
<td>6c. Satisfy unmet needs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

![TPM 13,7/8](image)
The “communicate goals” category includes different kinds of statements that refer to a need for personal contact. The responses were put into this category if they included words that referred to aligning a person/people and/or references to communication or contact. Some examples of key words relevant for this group are: “(sufficient) communicating with subordinates” (man, 46 years; man, 25 years; man 41 years), “open discussion about issues” (man, 49), “attainable as the need arises” (woman, 29), “flow of information and information is most important” (man, 57), “easy to approach” (man, 47), “(more) appointments with supervisor” (man, 54), “continuous personal contact” (man, 48), and “listens sufficiently to his subordinates” (man, 62).

The full response notes are shown below:

A supervisor is accessible as the need arises, he listens to his subordinates and his issues [...] He has time for his subordinates. The physical distance is not a problem as far as there are no bigger problems. But if problems arise, the distance from the supervisor causes a large amount of responsibility to be placed onto the team and onto the closest co-workers [...] How does a man act if the problems are due to co-workers and the team (for example, discriminating, tormenting, etc.)? Then you do not have a superior to pay attention to or to intervene in the situation; then the one who is tormented has to tell on his co-workers to the supervisor (man, 30).

Personal contact. A supervisor should know what a subordinate generally does and how well. Discussions of development (man, 52).

Also, personal meetings, listening and individual treatment. Feedback. Correctly intervening in issues, not marked in minutes. Solutions (woman, 27).

The lack of notes referring to teams or team leaders as a source of feedback, support or supervision is clear. For this reason, the need for personal contact and interaction with a hierarchical superior is emphasized here. Some responses seem to be realistic with the prevailing situation while some seem to have hope for more intensive action from supervisors.

The other distinguishing group of responses was for category 6a, “inspire and energize”, which got 70 notes. Most of them were short impressions about “feedback” (man, 56; man, 26; man, 29; man, 53; man, 60), “feedback when it is justified” (man, 46) and “clear and continuous feedback” (man, 45). When addressed as a whole, “inspire and energize” included responses such as the following:

A supervisor has to be equitable to everybody and understand different kinds of people. Goal setting must be proportioned to an employee’s mental and physical capabilities to work. Encouragement in a suitable situation can save the day (man, 39).

Good manners and requisite quick and firm feedback as needed. Good motivating skills (man, 40).

Matter-of-fact feedback. Also, pointing out what needs development (man, 50).

Knows and is familiar with the strengths and weaknesses of subordinates. Gives praise for success and feedback on things that they are doing poorly (man, 64).

The analysis reveals that supervisors along with the supervision that results from a hierarchy are still needed. In an organization with long distances and teams, expectations of any remaining managers are clear: to encourage, to motivate, to give more time for personal issues. Subordinates need feedback and incentives. These
aspects seem to be very important elements of sufficient and good supervisory duties. What seems almost completely lacking in category 6a (“inspire and energize”) are comments concerning teams, team leaders or the intrinsic satisfaction that employees derive from their work. In addition, none of the respondents mentions computer-aided systems, networks or ability combined with experience, which are suggested as supplements or substitutes for leadership, and as feedback or incentive methods (Howell et al., 1990; Huusko, 2006c).

The main finding is that leadership aspects are emphasized within employees’ images of sufficient and good supervisory work. The lack of feedback, cited in many responses, indicates that there are inadequate arrangements. Teams or systems do not work as adequate substitutes for leadership in a situation where a local manager has so many subordinates and he/she works far away from them. The output expected from team leaders did not appear in any of the responses. The aim of teams is to take on more managerial tasks and replace supervisors (Bacon and Blyton, 2005). These arrangements act as moderators, as Howell et al. (1990) state in their substitutes for leadership theory. Some findings fit into the four moderators discussed earlier that are considered by teams. Actual substitutes work to such a degree that they virtually negate a leader’s ability to either improve or impair workers’ performance. As no respondent mentioned his/her team or team members as a source of feedback, incentives or rules, it can be concluded that teams or team leaders do not act as actual substitutes for leadership. Instead, the results refer to “promises that are too good [to be true] by teams”. Consequently, it seems that at least some teams work, if anything, as neutralizers. That is, teams even have attributes of subordinates, tasks and organizations that interfere with a leader’s aims to influence workers. Although the conclusions made here are based on a case study within a certain field they can be justified by two arguments. They match with several earlier researches (Sinclair, 1992; Hamde, 2000; Siltala, 2004; Antila, 2006; Huusko, 2006b; Ylöstalo, 2006) and they serve further investigations.

The answers given to the second question give reference to supplements that can complete a leader’s impact on employees (Howell et al., 1990). Computer-aided direction systems are suitable for clear issues whose aim is to consider everybody in the same manner (Huusko, 2006c). In this way, they are objective. At the same time, it seems to be clear that a collection of several systems is not a sufficient substitute for leadership in organizations with long distances and varying working circumstances. Within a forestry company and its teams, varying circumstances refer to both physical and mental conditions. Hence, workers feel that there is no place in systems to address the deviations they encounter in everyday work. In this sense, background elements like systems for linking teams without leaders will provide conflict. This stems from the fact that the workers who act as part of a team do not feel that they have adequate leadership available to them. Therefore, the normative basis grounded on modern paradigms and conceptions of workers as team members based on a symbolic-interpretative paradigm come into conflict.

Conclusions and discussion
Several arrangements in post-modern organizations have blurred earlier roles of supervisors and subordinates. Leadership substitutes can be implemented wittingly or unknowingly. A leader can develop work environments that, for example, encourage
interaction among team members and thereby yield task guidance and incentives. If there is a need to manage employees who are geographically dispersed or there are large spans of control, it makes sense to create substitutes for leadership. Despite this, many organizations assign responsibility for providing feedback to the hierarchical superior even in cases where the superior works at a physical distance from employees or does not know enough about their everyday duties to provide proper feedback and/or incentives (Howell et al. 1990; Skrabec, 2000; Huusko, 2006c). Teams often do not act as internal supervisors or as sources of feedback and incentives, even though they are expected to do so. In addition, some team members experience feelings of being abandoned, as Sinclair (1992) has noted. Hence, although planned as substitutes or supplements, teams can instead become neutralizers. Therefore, it is necessary to consider the circumstances in which teams are appropriate (Kakadabse and Sheard, 2002).

Within HRM issues there are certain clear areas that can be managed by numbers and calculations. Often, those issues are also easily controllable by system management. At the same time, with regard to the reduction of supervisors and middle managers, it is useful to recognize the substituting actors. The question was introduced regarding whether, and in which kinds of circumstances, teams can develop to be actors that act as supplements to computer-aided management systems. Team literature (e.g. Katzenbach and Smith, 1994; Van Amelsvoort and Benders, 1996; Benders and Van Hootegem, 1999; Bunning, 2000; Benders et al., 2001; Huusko, 2003; Bacon and Blyton, 2005; Kuipers, 2005) emphasizes the value of internal feedback and incentives as well as the value of having access to planning and scheduling processes concerning everyday work or education. Both approaches include important elements that point to possibilities to develop teams toward substitutes for leadership. The target organization would benefit by concentrating on the skills and capabilities of their teams as well as their team leaders.

Legislative demands were included in this discussion to provide a normative background for addressing teams as an example of new arrangements in organizations. Although it is not easy to point out how and when sufficient and good supervisory work can be put into practice, certain norms cannot be ignored. This has been emphasized in recent reforms in legislation by including mental health definitions into legal text. The basic Finnish labor laws are based on personal contact, at least to some extent. The phrases “under employer’s consideration” and “to take care of duties referred to here” (that is, occupational safety and health) constitute the background for respondents’ comments concerning feedback and incentives. From the empirical research, the deficiency of personal feedback and inadequacy of leadership by systems were evidenced in the notes of the workers. The notes emerged in this study in a similar way as in earlier investigations (Huusko, 2006b). Hence, Tayloristic settings persist even in modern day organizations, although they aim to offer possibilities for satisfaction in work, intrinsic feedback from interesting duties or self-directed teams as substitutes for leadership. The empirical part was conducted as a case study within the Finnish section of a forestry company. As such, the results are not necessarily valid in other parts of the same company or even for other Finnish companies. However, the lack of leadership or need for proper leadership have also been reported in more comprehensive research projects in Finland (Siltala, 2004; Antila, 2006; Ylöstalo, 2006).
Also, other theoretical frameworks raise interesting perspectives. By combining theories concerning substitutes for leadership that identify moderators (Howell et al., 1986) and create substitutes (Howell et al., 1990) with Kotter’s division and suppositions concerning teams, the whole reveals contradictory elements. This may indicate a lack of understanding of legal requirements, a lack of skills in new positions (Huusko, 2006a), a lack of requisite support in developing norms and structures that consistently produce feedback (Howell et al., 1990) or a lack of understanding about distances between parties. More and detailed investigations are needed to find out how these contradictory elements work. Computer-aided management systems have been offered to substitute supervisory duties in many organizations. In precisely defined, everyday duties, this may work but these systems are not suitable for personal feedback (Huusko, 2006c). Neither elements of a team organization nor systems appear to “provide task guidance or incentives to perform to such a degree that they virtually negate the leader’s ability to either improve or impair subordinate performance” (Howell et al., 1990, p. 23).

On the other hand, it seems clear that the lack of demanded skills can hinder the proper use of teams as a means of management and leadership (Huusko, 2006a). Team members are not accustomed to acting as substitutes for leadership and providing each other with requisite feedback. In any case, both juridical requirements and managerial arrangements co-operate in workplaces in everyday work. Hence, they both must be seen as compulsory elements of the framework of sufficient and good supervisory work. If there is an aim to use teams as substitutes for leadership, teams must be given real managerial status with a proper orientation and adequate changes. Besides teams, other current means of management, like computer-aided direction systems, also act as substitutes for leadership. In addition, their status within traditional relations between supervisors and subordinates is worth researching. The idea of moderators refers to different kinds of factors that exist in workplaces. The aim is to test if the factors help to form groups as the changing supervisory-subordinate relations are investigated through factor analysis.

The preliminary results of the empirical investigation indicate a clear need for further research with both national and international partners. More precise research concerning mechanisms within teams as well as within systems that function as supervisors is important. These mechanisms may reveal valuable information that can serve our wellbeing in our working lives. It would be interesting to organize an international research project that includes both juridical and managerial points of view to develop better background knowledge of team working.

Notes
1. This project began in the year 2004 and has been funded by several foundations. The main aim is to reveal different kinds of changes in supervisory duties through several means.
2. In Finnish the questions were: (1) “Mita asioita mielestäsi kuuluu riittävään ja hyvään esimiestyöhön?” and (2) “Millaississa tapauksissa toiminnanohjausjärjestelmät ovat mielestäsi riittävät esimiehestävien hoitamiseen?”.
3. Many respondents gave several responses.
References


**Further reading**


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